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dignitary at his own door, and when the said high dignitary has seated himself in Japanese fashion, on his heels on the carpet, to squat himself down in like manner, bowing his head two or three times to the ground, and thus making his compliment, as it is termed here. In all this I should see nothing, it being the usual mode in which Japanese grandees receive and salute each other; but here, in my mind, lies the offence, that between Japanese this compliment is reciprocated, whilst at an interview between a Netherlander and a Japanese

grandee of the rank of a *gobanyosi*, the compliment of the former is not returned by the latter, he being esteemed an exceedingly friendly burgomaster, or *gobanyosi*, who even nods his head to the Netherlander in token of approval. All this is the more striking to the Netherlander newly landed at Dezima and not yet used to the custom, because he observes the Japanese to be amongst themselves full of ceremony and demonstration of politeness, in which the nation yields to no other, not even to the French."



JAPANESE LADY.

THE DEAD BRIDAL.

A VENETIAN TALE OF THE FOURTEENTH CENTURY.

BY JONATHAN FREKE SLINGSBY.

CHAPTER XIX.

LET us go back to two of the personages of our tale in whom we trust our readers are interested.

Giulio Polani had returned with the troops to Venice, and resumed his intercourse with Bianca without any restraint. In truth, there seemed to be no reason why the young people should feel any restraint. It was natural for them to suppose that the Count Polani would not be averse to their union, and he certainly did not seem to trouble himself about the matter. Alas! his thoughts were occupied too much about his pecuniary difficulties to permit him to be very keen-eyed as to how two young members of his family passed their time; and if he thought of Bianca, it was with the determination that, come

what might, he would resist, if possible, the fulfilment of his foolish contract in relation to her.

Upon the day when the count paid the visit to Pietro Molo, Giulio and Bianca sat alone in a *salone* of the Palazzo Polani. The young man looked fondly upon the girl, but his look was full of joy—there was nothing to trouble its happiness, or dim the confiding hope that shone out from his eyes. The girl, with glowing cheek and down-turned eyes, was apparently contemplating, with very profound attention, a fresh rose-bud which she held in her hand, but from which she nevertheless from time to time plucked the young leaves. The case of the young couple was manifest. Even old Giudetta, dim-eyed as

she was, would at once have pronounced them to be lovers, who had told their love, and had nothing now to do but to tell it over again.

"Dearest Bianca," said Giulio, "when you have quite demolished that pretty rose—which hath done you no wrong that I know of, save that it too is fair—will you do me the favour to let me know whereon your thoughts are so busy for the last minute and a half?"

The girl looked up and smiled, but her smile had somewhat of sadness in it.

"I thought, dear Giulio, how very happy I am; and then came a something over my spirit that made me sad and fearful, lest such happiness was too great to be long-lived: one is sure to find a cloud crossing the heart when it is glad, as the shadow is always the darkest when the sun shines most brightly."

"Nay, nay, dear one, not so shall it be with us: ours shall be the sunshine of the long, long summer day; no cloud save those that will deck heaven in gold and purple—no shadows save those that bring freshness and repose."

"Ah! that it may be so, Giulio; and yet I have some reason to fear—"

"How?—where?—from whom? Tell me at once, Bianca. My father surely will not disapprove—"

"I have no cause to think he will; but— Come, I will tell thee what has disturbed me. It was but yesterday that, as I sat in the balcony overlooking the canal, watching the gondolas pass by, one with a band of minstrels in it stopped beneath my window, when a girl began to sing to the music of a rebeck. After her song was ended, I gave her a guerdon, and she cried to me in a merry voice, 'Thanks, dear lady; mayst thou have a happy bridal and a speedy.' At this moment the man who played upon the rebeck looked up, and fixed his glittering black eyes upon me, and then he spoke in a deep, sad voice: 'Sorrow, and trial, and darkness! The bridegroom shall come, but Death shall enter at the door with him. He who comes to wed shall go forth without a bride. Sorrow, and trial, and darkness!' I sank backwards with a scream, and when I recovered my composure sufficiently to look down again, the gondola had disappeared. But the words of that man still ring in my ears, and his black, glittering eyes, and his high forehead with the deep scar across it, haunt me incessantly."

"A deep scar across the forehead, didst thou say, Bianca?" asked Giulio, and his heart sank within him as he recognised in the description the ciarlatano, Bartolomeo.

"Yes, dear Giulio, dost thou know such a one?"

"Nay, nay, I did but seek to know some mark whereby I might find the knave that affrighted thee. But dismiss this silly adventure from thy mind. Come, thou shalt sing for me ere I leave thee."

The girl looked up into his face with a smile of trusting love, and while a sigh fluttered upon her lips she took up her mandolin and said—

"Thou shalt hear the newest canzone in Venice, Giulio—They call it

LA BELLEZZA.

O'er a swift, bright streamlet blowing,
A rose stooped down, one day,
To catch, in the limpid waters flowing,
Her blushing image gay;
But the breeze of morn came freshly by,
And brushed the vain rose impetuously,
Rending each tender leaf away.

The leaves fell down the waves among,
And they bore them, rushing for ever along,
Far, far, to the hungry sea—
Thus rapidly, O Heaven, still flies,
Adown time's checkless river,
The loveliness that most we prize,
From our fond eyes for ever."

"Thanks, dear Bianca, a pretty song in sooth, and hath a good moral withal. Well, as Time's river speeds with us all, shall we not do well to float down the stream as smoothly as we can? And now, must I leave thee for a time. Addio, carissima, we shall meet soon again."

And, kissing the hand of his mistress, he departed.

Thus day succeeded day, and March was now drawing to its close; the Count Polani sought in vain to extricate himself from the difficulties that surrounded him. He applied in various quarters for a loan on his estates, but he found, what many a man has found since and before, that in proportion to one's necessities for money is the difficulty of obtaining it. A few years since he would have met a hundred goldsmiths ready to lend; now there seemed suddenly to be a dearth in the coffers of every one of those sagacious citizens. Somehow they had all discovered that the count was going down in the world, and they assisted him accordingly to—go down still further. At length, it was within one day of that upon which the bond to Molo would be payable, and the count with all his exertions was able to raise little more than half the amount: to apply again to the banker was, he well knew, useless, and would but subject him to the humiliation of a refusal. One thing, therefore, seemed certain, that upon the morrow, when old Molo should demand his money, that demand could not be complied with; and then what were to be the consequences? Would the old usurer really seek the fulfilment of the other condition of the obligation?—or would he not rather proceed against the property and person of his debtor and get what he could? The laws against debtors were very stringent, and Molo might hope in the long run to extract the last farthing; but, on the other hand, had he not refused all compromise and arrangement, and doggedly announced his determination to abide by the contract, and to enforce it too? and, above all, he had procured the license from the council for the marriage of his nephew. All these things the unhappy count revolved in his mind as he sat by himself that morning in one of the apartments of his palace; at length, he started up with the air of a man who has formed some desperate determination.

"I will go to Bianca," he muttered, "I will tell her all; she shall know that it is in her power to save me; that I have sold her, as needy men sell their jewels," he added bitterly; "and then let her decide. After all she may, perhaps, think the hand of a wealthy citizen should not be spurned by a poor noble's daughter. Come, we shall see."

A few moments brought him to the boudoir of the girl.

"A fair morning to you, dear child," said the count, with an unwonted tenderness as he sat down beside her. "I have come to intrude upon your solitude. In truth I begin to think you pass but a lonely life of it here."

"Nay," replied the girl, "it is not so. I am not lonely with so many friends. Have I not yourself at times, and the signora Lucretzia and her daughter Caterina, and my dear old Giudetto? and more, is not there my brother Giulio?" One who was versed in the ways of women might have detected a slight embarrassment in the last words of the young lady; but the Count Polani was not much skilled in such matters; besides his thoughts were otherwise occupied, and so he did not perceive it.

"Ah, yes, no doubt, Bianca; that's all very well in its way. But thou art now of years to think of other companionship. Dost know that I have had a suitor for thy hand? Aye, and a wealthy one, too."

The maiden's heart beat fast, but she did not speak; could Giulio, thought she, have disclosed all to his father? After a moment's pause the count continued—

"Give me now, my dear child, for a little space, thy attention, while I state all to thee. Thou knowest how that in thy early years thou wast committed to my care by thy father, my dear friend—how I have nurtured thee even as I have my own child, and though my habits and sex precluded my attending personally to thee, yet I hope thou hast never stood in need of aught that kindness could supply."

"You have indeed ever been very good, dear signore," replied Bianca, "and I have had much happiness."

"I rejoice to hear thee say so. Well, the time is now come when it imports thee to know that thy father, when consigning thee to my guardianship, enjoined upon thee not only in his testament, but also in a writing addressed to thyself, that thou shouldst be solely guided by me in the matter of thy

marriage; that thou shouldest accept no suitor save at my hands, and that thou shouldest yield an entire obedience to my wishes therein, even as thou wouldest to him, if living. Here is the letter, Bianca; thou shalt read it by and by; meantime, let me proceed. Hast thou ever read, my pretty one," continued the count, with an affection of gaiety which he did not feel, "that, by an ancient law of our republic, he that offered the most money was entitled to the hand of the fairest damsel, and a part of his wealth was assigned by the state as a portion for the maidens who had neither personal charms nor wealth to attract suitors. Well, that old law is abolished, but somewhat of its spirit survives, for the fathers of Venice are wont to think that they best consult the honour and dignity of their houses when they bestow their most beautiful daughters on the wealthiest suitors; and the daughters of Venice are ever obedient to the command of their parents, and recognise the wisdom of the state in making the will of the parent all but paramount."

The count paused a moment. He had, in his own opinion, made a capital opening, and he sought to discover the effect which his words had upon his auditor. In this, however, he was unsuccessful. Bianca listened unmoving, with her eyes turned downwards, and, save from the paleness of her cheek, one could not perceive any symptom of emotion.

"Well, as I said, my dear child, a wealthy suitor seeks thy hand—one whose riches can retrieve the splendour of your ancient, though now impoverished house, and place thee where by thy birth thou shouldest be; for thou knowest how wealth is worshipped in this our state of Venice, and how it can achieve all things. He is young, too, and report speaks well of him as fairly endowed in mind and person. To-morrow this youth—Girolamo Molo, the son of the great banker of Milano, and a citizen of Venice—will seek your hand with my full permission."

"To-morrow!" exclaimed the maiden, looking at the count with an expression of surprise and terror—"surely, dear signore, you cannot mean this! Besides, I am indeed contented to live amongst those whom I now know and love, and desire to form no new ties. Ah! in the name of heaven, let not this be. I beseech you, in the name of my dear parent who placed me in your hands, suffer me to remain as I am at present—we're he alive, I should not sue to him in vain."

"What folly is this, Bianca? Here art thou a maiden, of years to become a matron; a hand and a fortune are offered thee which few would reject; and yet wouldest thou decline so fair a proposal, and that without having even seen him who makes it. This cannot be."

The poor girl arose, and casting herself at the feet of the count, burst into a passion of tears. Polani was amazed, and not a little moved by so unexpected an exhibition. Heretofore he had ever found the young girl gentle and submissive to all his requests, and scarce gave her credit for great depth or strength of feeling. He raised her gently, and seating her again beside him, sought to soothe her as best he was able.

"How is this, dear child? It may be that I have disclosed the matter to you somewhat too suddenly. Be comforted, Bianca. Thou hast nothing to fear from me. In the name of that father to whose memory thou hast appealed, I, in my turn, beseech you to hear me. Thou shalt know how deeply my own honour and welfare, as well as Giulio's, whom thou dost love as a brother, are involved in this matter. I have solemnly pledged myself to the uncle of this youth, which as thy guardian I might lawfully do, that he should have thy hand in marriage; should I fail in my engagement, I am under the obligation to pay upon the instant a large sum of money as an equivalent. That sum I have not, nor can I by any human means procure it. The consequence of my default, I need not tell thee, will be to me imprisonment, confiscation, ruin—to Giulio, beggary, a blasted name, and expatriation."

"Oh! terrible, terrible!" cried the girl, shuddering. "Is there no other means of saving those I love than by sacrificing myself. Ah, dear signore, I will cheerfully give my own poor inheritance towards discharging this obligation. Take it, take it—only spare me the misery of—"

"My dear Bianca, I might not, even if I were willing, avail myself of thy generosity. Thou art not yet of an age to dispose of thy property, and the state would not suffer any one to plunder thee. And now that thou seest the whole matter, this much do I require of thee at least. Receive the visit of this youth to-morrow. Judge for thyself; remember the duty thou owest to me, as filling the place of thy father; forget not that in Venice the child resists not the will of the parent in such things; forget not how much is at stake; and then—yes, dear Bianca—then, I know well, thou wilt act as I would have thee. And now, dear child, I leave thee for the present; thou wilt receive the youth at the appointed time, and I confidently reckon on thy obedience."

It was long before the bewildered girl could compose her mind sufficiently to think with calmness upon this sudden trial. And, in truth, thought brought her but little comfort. The entire subjection to parental authority, in which women were educated in Venice, the mode in which marriages were arranged, as a matter of contract and convenience between the fathers without paying the slightest regard to the feelings of the children, made the conduct of the count appear less tyrannical in the eyes of Bianca than it would in those of a daughter of our own happy land; and the habitual deference which she had ever rendered to every command of the count, would, in all probability, have induced her to have yielded an unresisting obedience in this case, had not her affections been already engaged. But now she clung to her love with all the truth and fidelity of woman's nature—she could not resign it. She felt as though it would be easier to resign life itself. And Giulio, how would he endure the trial?—would he relinquish her without an effort? It was plain, as yet, he was in ignorance of this fatal contract—ah, could he have the means of preventing it?—and then the ruin which her refusal would involve him in: him whom she loved well enough to sacrifice everything for. The conflict between love and duty raged in the mind of the unhappy girl with a fierceness and violence all the greater, that it was unwonted, and her heart was well nigh rent in the struggle. Hours thus passed and found her still sitting in the chair where the count had left her, when the door was gently opened and Giulio Polani entered.

"Why, dearest Bianca, I thought thou must have been at thy orisons. Here have I been knocking, I know not how long, at thy chamber door, and having received no answer, I have been forced to act as my own usher. But, Santissima Madre! what is the matter with thee? Thou art ill, surely."

Ill, indeed, she was; ill in mind and ill in body also. Her eyes were swollen and red with weeping; she was pale and languid, and her head throbbed with a dull, heavy aching. The young man sprang to her side and seized her hand.

"Cielo! dearest, how is this?—thy pulse is weak and fluttering, thy hand is cold—speak, in God's name, and tell me, hath aught happened?"

"Much! much!" cried the girl, and bending her head forward, she sobbed hysterically upon the bosom of her lover.

We shall not pursue the scene further. Let such of our readers draw upon his or her experience, if such he or she have; if that happily be wanting, fancy must supply its place. At length, however, Giulio became acquainted with the full extent of the calamity that impended over both. To relinquish the object of his affection was not to be thought of—what young man like him ever did so in the face of difficulty and danger? When he had offered the best comfort in his power, and the girl was somewhat calm, he said:

"Dearest Bianca, I know that thou art true to our love. Wilt thou be faithful to the end, come what may?"

"To the death, dear Giulio," said the girl, with a solemn energy that seemed strange in one of her gentle nature.

"Then are we not without hope, even wert thou at the altar's foot. Meantime, something may yet be done to discharge my father's debt, even at the last moment. See this note, dearest; I came to make thee acquainted with its import, and now it seems as if heaven has sent this opportunity to me. Thou dost remember the young French seigneur, Jacques de

la Mole, whom I brought to see thee near twelve months since? Well, not half an hour ago, this paper was put into my hands by Tommaso, who had it from a gondolier at the door of the palazzo."

The young man then read the note:—

"Fate brings me once again to Venice, and I am reminded of thee, dear Giulio. Come to me this evening after sunset, I entreat thee by our old friendship. Thou wilt find me at the sign of the 'Croce d'Oro' at Mestre. I do not forget that I am thy debtor, and will repay thee with interest."

JACQUES."

"Now, dearest Bianca," continued Giulio, "I will go to my friend and disclose all to him. I know the amount of my father's debt to old Molo, and I doubt not that Jacques will readily place the sum at my service, as I am well aware that he is wealthy enough to do so without inconvenience. If I succeed—and I know his friendship and generosity too well to entertain a doubt—then shall the old usurer's debt be repaid in good time, and we shall be saved; but, if the worst happen, be well assured that thou shalt not, save with thy own consent, be the bride of another, while I have life and a free arm to save thee. Have a brave heart, then, dearest, while I go to meet my friend. I shall see thee again to-night, upon my return: for the present, addio! May the Virgin have thee in her keeping."

The sun had scarce sunk below the horizon, when the gondola of Giulio Polani, having traversed the lagune, reached Mestre, then, as now, one of the principal approaches to Venice from the north. Despite of the confident assurances with which he sought to support Bianca, his heart was full of trouble and doubt; and as he entered the *osteria* of the "Croce d'Oro," he felt somewhat as a gambler may be supposed to feel who has staked his all upon the turn of the dice which he is just about to cast. Passing through the grooms and servitors that crowded the court-yard, he was shown into a private apartment, and in a moment found himself in the arms of his friend.

"Pardieu, mon cher Jules," said Jacques, after they were seated; "I owe you some apology for my discourteous departure last year; but it was expedient for me to act as I did. Had I not left Venice, I might have been involved in serious difficulties—but of that no more at present. I hope at some future period to be more explicit. And now, cher enfant, tell me all about thyself and thine; and first of all, how is my fair enemy, for so I must call her, seeing that she caused me to lose my wager—thy sister: is it not so you call her?" And Jacques smiled significantly; "the signora Bianca I mean."

"Ah! caro mio," replied Giulio with a forced gaiety, "a truce with thy bantering. If thou hast lost thy wager, thou didst find out my secret."

"Aye, Giulio," replied the other, gravely, "and I hold the knowledge cheaply purchased. Ma foi! my own heart would have been lost to the fair one did I not quickly discover that I could not do homage to beauty without being false to friendship. And now, Giulio, having sacrificed so much to my friend, I am entitled to know how fares his love-suit."

"Dear Jacques, my best friend, I acknowledge thy claim. I have come to tell thee all; to consult thee; to tax thy friendship to the utmost."

Giulio then recounted the mutual love of himself and Bianca, how they had bound themselves irrevocably to be faithful to that love, how their happiness was now imperilled by the embarrassments of the count's affairs, and the singular compact which he had entered into with old Pietro Molo. To all this his auditor listened with profound attention, nor did he suffer an expression of any sentiment to escape his lips till Giulio came to an end. Even then he continued silent for some time, and then asked—

"What did you say was the name of the banker? Molo, was it not Molo?"

"Yes, Pietro Molo; every one in Venice knows him. I marvel that you have not heard his name."

"Strange!" pursued the other half musingly. "Is he

connected in any way with Jacopo Molo, the great banker of Milan?"

"They are brothers."

"Ah, I see. And the young man is the son of Jacopo, I presume. Do you know his name?"

"Girolamo."

"Girolamo! Girolamo Molo! I had some knowledge of a youth of that name in Damascus. He was connected with the Milanese family, too, if I remember aright. Why it must be the same, Giulio."

"Very possible, my dear Jacques. Pray what sort of a person may he be? Is he a formidable rival, think you?"

"Well, that's not an easy question to answer. And yet there be those who would think he might find favour in the eyes of a fair lady, even of Venice. But coraggio, dear Giulio; you have been beforehand with him, and secured the lady's affections. But that unlucky contract that your father has entered into gives him a terrible advantage, supposing that the money shall not be forthcoming."

"Ah, diavolo! Yes, Jacques, there is the difficulty, and in that you must help me."

"As how, Giulio?"

"You have often told me you are wealthy beyond your utmost wants. I know you are generous, and I believe you are my friend. Lend me then, dear Jacques, this sum, and my father and myself shall ensure thee the repayment of it by the pledge of all we possess in the world. I know well how far he would go to avert the degradation of giving the child of a Morosini to a wealthy plebeian."

"Of course he would. I can fully sympathise with his feelings in that respect. Well then, to save him and thee, and above all the fair Bianca, from such a calamity, I shall do my utmost. How much do you want?"

"Five thousand ducats."

"A large sum, by my faith; and upon such short notice. Well, suppose I am unable to arrange the matter for thee by to-morrow, what then?"

"What then?" repeated Giulio fiercely; "why that I will tear her from his arms, even though he and I perish!"

"Ah, Dieu!" cried Jacques, with a shudder, "ça serait grand dommage. Well, sooner than endanger thy life or that of Girolamo, whose plebeian puddle is not worth one drop of thy aristocratic blood, I will give thee the sum thou requirest. Fortunately I have letters of exchange upon this very Molo, nearly to that amount. Thy father can supply what I fall short, so far as a thousand ducats or so. Is it not so?"

"Oh, yes!" said Giulio eagerly.

"Ah, then the matter is settled; thou shalt have the bills just now. Meantime, thou shalt pledge me in the health of the fair Bianca, and success to thy undertaking. Nay, nay, dear friend, no more thanks, pray;" and he restrained the protestations of gratitude which Giulio was pouring forth in a delirium of joy.

The young man continued to converse for some time, but Jacques soon perceived that his companion was too much engrossed by his own affairs to be able to sustain the part of a boon companion. Accordingly, he arose, and taking from his portmanteau, which lay on a chair in the room, a small casket bound with straps of gold, he unlocked it, and drew forth several papers. From these he selected several bills, or letters of exchange, and placing them in the hands of Giulio, said,—

"Here, caro mio, are bills to the amount of four thousand ducats. Your old friend Molo will scarce refuse to honour them. We shall meet again soon in Venice, when thou canst give me the security thou proposest. And now thou art anxious to depart, so I will not detain thee. Buona notte."

The friends embraced cordially, and in a few moments more, Giulio was crossing the lagunes in his gondola to Venice; the twilight had faded into darkness before he left Mestre, and long ere he reached the city the gloom of night had settled down upon it.